
OKOBORE HIME
TO
ENTAKU NO KISHI

The Leftover Princess and the Knights of the Round

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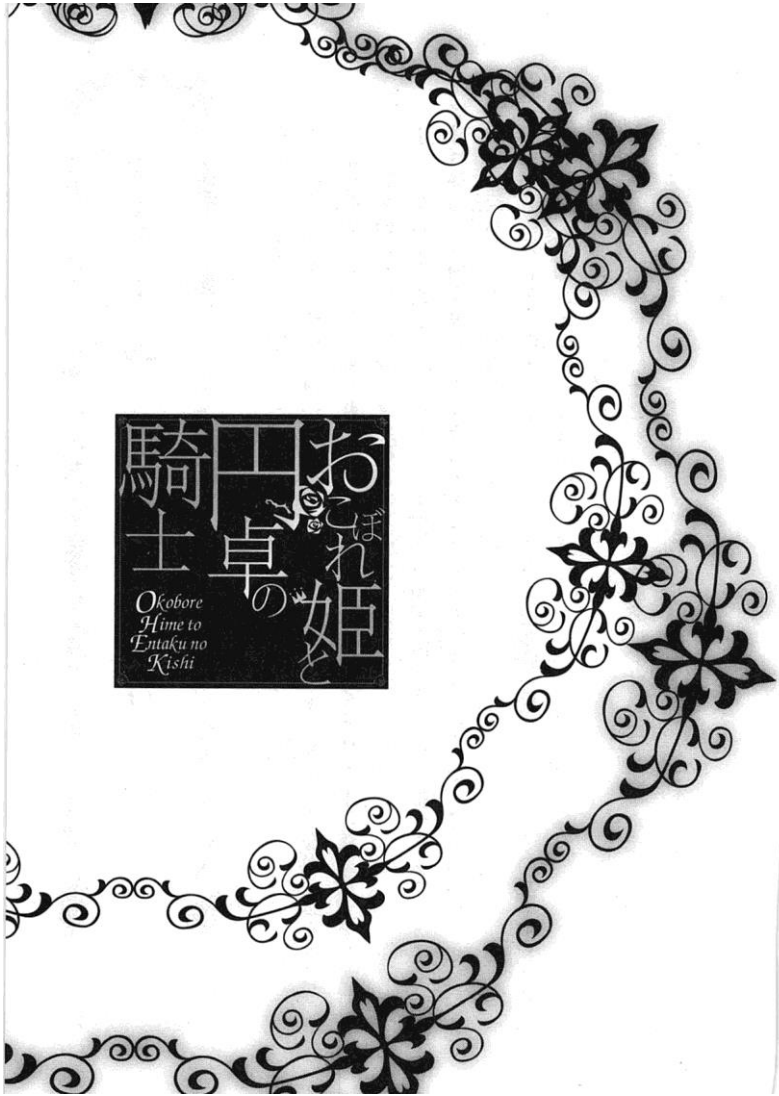
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Translator's note:

The Japanese honorifics were kept in the translation of the dialogues of the characters to show the respect or adoration shown by the characters. Footnotes were provided upon the first appearance of the honorific in the chapter to explain it.

Thoughts are signified by '*italics*'.



CHAPTER II THE PRINCESS' TEA PARTY

The attempted poisoning of Princess Leticia was not made known to the public and was simply declared as a case of colds. Fabricated statements such as, “It was just a slight fever,” or “The princess was already on her way to recovery,” were intentionally leaked out to complete the story. Duke did not have the means to find out how Leti fared after he had left her, and he often found himself wondering how she was doing while unconsciously looking east, where the Royal Palace was.

“Senpai¹, has your father recovered from his cold?”

“His cold... Ah, yeah, yeah, he’s healthy now. I doubt he’ll be leaving us any time soon.”

During the three days that Leti was on the brink of life and death, Duke told a lie that he was asked to go home for a while because his father, Lord Barchet, was sick, in order to cover up for his absence while he stood as Leti's bodyguard.

‘That was close, I nearly forgot the story I made up as my excuse.’

“Ah, I heard that the Princess was sick as well.”

“So I heard, though she doesn’t seem to be one defeated by a mere cold. She’ll be fine,” Duke said with a tinge of hope, wishing that Leti was truly well. Duke was worried about her, enough for

¹ Senpai – a Japanese honorific used in addressing one’s senior

him to think that he would endure Leti's relentless invitations to be her knight if only it would make her feel better.

“Hmm... Then I won't really know which of them is...” *Death would have proven they were mere humans.* Astrid had a vague, fleeting thought and Duke did not catch what he said.

“What was that?”

“Eh? Did I say anything?”

Duke was puzzled with Astrid's reaction, so he thought it was just the wind. After dismissing the thought, his heart went back to Leti, and he even thought of asking Prince Friedhelm directly to inquire about her condition.

Just as Duke was thinking of how to get information on Leti, it came to him instead – not through reports or rumors, but through Leti herself.

“...Ah. ...Good day, I'm glad you're fine now.”

“Thank you.”

Duke had returned to the camp after being called to clean up a squabble in town. Upon his return, he saw Princess Leticia in the camp with all her elegance and grandeur like she owned the place. The other knights were staring at her from a distance, whispering of how beautiful and elegant she was, while Duke wanted to shout

“Don’t be fooled by her looks!” at them because he knew that beyond her pretty face was a woman with more guts than any knight in the Order.

“Unfortunately, I am busy and cannot stay long.”

“I understand. May I know your business then, Your Highness?”

“I came here to give an invitation.”

Leti took out from her purse a white envelope sealed with red wax and gave it to Duke. The envelope was so high class that Duke knew he’d be chastised if he tore it open with his bare hands.

“Ah, Senpai, I’ll get you a paper knife!”

Duke took the expensive-looking antique paper knife Astrid brought and carefully opened the envelope.

“Thanks.”

Duke returned the paper knife to Astrid, opened the invitation and read its contents.

“Tea party?”

“Yes, as thanks for the other day.”

Duke remembered that Leti did say she’d thank him. He appreciated Leti’s sincerity, but wearily thought that she could’ve thanked him in a different manner. A tea party hosted by the next

queen couldn't possibly be anything but grand, and he – the son of a poor baron – would definitely be a fish out of water. He could already imagine how awkward he'd be in there.

“...I'm very honored by your invitation, but please allow me to decline it. Such a gathering is too much for someone like me who has yet to even inherit the barony.”

“I was expecting you would refuse, so I just made it a small, intimate party with only my close family in attendance. It is a simple event I wished to host in order to show them that I have fully recovered. I did not want them worrying too much.”

Duke once again took a look at the elegant invitation. Strictly speaking, Duke was part of the nobility – though barely making the cut. But even if he came from a baron's family, he was not familiar with the ways of high society, such as going to the theater or tea parties.

“If you have a fiancée or a lover, you can take her with you. Once I become the queen, things will be busier, so it is best if you introduce her to me, your future master, early on.”

“Wait, wait, wait. In a broad sense you will be my master but specifically speaking you won't be...”

He really could not let his guard down around Leti, who kept on talking as if he really would be her knight in the near future. On the other hand, he wouldn't mind going to the tea party if it really was just a small family affair. Besides, it was highly likely that even

if he refused the invitation, Leti would find some way or another to drag him to it on the day itself. He decided the safest reply would be, “I’ll think about it,” since he’d have to leave if anything came up with the Order.

Duke escorted Leti until the camp gates, and soon after she was gone, he let out a deep, deep sigh of exhaustion and relief.

“A fiancée, huh... Guess it won’t be rude even if I came without a partner. It’s not an evening ball anyway.”

Duke thought of asking a friend familiar with the customs of high society when realization suddenly hit him.

“Wait a second, *her* close family, meaning...”

It had slipped past him, but he just realized now that the family members of PRINCESS Leticia meant the Royal Family. Her small, intimate gathering meant only the Royal Family would be in attendance because if it were something bigger, then there’d be other peers and nobles to attend.

“...all the more I won’t fit in!”

Leti had known that and deliberately used those words to make Duke think otherwise. He was such an idiot, to be tricked by Leti with such a simple play on words. Now that she was back on her feet, she immediately dragged him into something troublesome. He chided that part of himself that actually wanted to congratulate

Leti on her recovery and decided he'd better bring a companion with him to the party.

“Astrid, are you free on the day after tomorrow? Yes, you're free so come and accompany your senior to Her Highness' tea party.”

Of course, Duke's primary choice for companion was his bubbly junior in the Order, Astrid, who was quite a fan of the beautiful princess. Needless to say, Astrid immediately accepted the offer.

“But is it fine for me to come? I'm just a commoner.”

“That's exactly why I chose you. You're a commoner and you can be my conversation partner. I doubt I'd have anyone to talk to there. We'll go home immediately after drinking a cup of tea.”

Astrid dreamily imagined a world he could not even fathom, and the only clear image was the beautiful Princess Leticia.

“Ah! Should we bring presents? Are there rules on what to bring or not? There's a bakeshop in town I highly recommend.”

“...When I'm with you, I feel like I'm stupid sometimes.”

It would be good if Duke could just innocently enjoy the upcoming event, but he was a serious man by nature and he could not help but worry about things.

“Wear your formal uniform. Don’t forget your cape and white gloves. And polish your boots. Don’t bring any speck of dust with you.”

“Yes sir! Is the cape the grey one we wore during the Induction Ceremony?”

“Yeah, that one. Is it still grey? If it’s too dirty, borrow one from the others.”

“...Yes. ...I think?”

The Royal Chivalric Order had ten ranks and their ranks were shown by the color of their capes and the lines on it. So the neophytes, including Astrid, were Knights of the Tenth Rank and they had grey capes with no lines. The Commander of the Order was a knight of the First Rank and his cape was black with lines. The color got darker the higher the rank, so one could easily know it.

“They should reverse the color-coding. The younger ones have a higher tendency to dirty their capes, making the color closer to that of the Commander’s.”

So here were two knights going to the same tea party: the junior with a cape nearing the color black, dreaming of the upcoming party, and the senior wondering how things ended up happening this way and deciding to review and reflect on the events that lead to it.

“It is an honor to be here today, Your Highness.”

Duke preparing for the obligatory greeting for such an occasion, but since he lacked practice in saying such words, his words were monotonous and lifeless. After the customary acknowledgements, he took Leti's fair and slender hand and respectfully brought it to his lips.

“It is my pleasure to have you here. Please enjoy yourselves.” Leti welcomed him with her perfected smile, just as an ideal princess would, and looked at the lad behind Duke.

“My name is Astrid Gale, knight of the Tenth Rank of the Royal Chivalric Order. I humbly give you my thanks for letting me join this occasion.”

“I have heard things about you from my younger brother, such as your exceptional skills as a swordsman despite your young age. Do share some of your stories with me later,” Leti said and flashed a smile at Astrid.

Duke, watching the exchange, thought that he would keep in the deepest parts of his mind the image of Astrid's idiotic, blushing face, as if he had seen a goddess brought to life from a painting. He had long given up on warning Astrid against Leti's beauty, knowing that his efforts would only fall on deaf ears.

“This way.”

As Leti showed them to the garden, they saw Friedhelm playing with the children, carrying a child on each of his arm. When he saw who the newcomers were, he slowly lowered the children and waved his hand to greet Duke.

“Is that Astrid Gale behind you? This is a good chance to invite him to Seventh Heaven².”

Friedhelm greeted Duke briefly and went on to pat Astrid on the shoulder. While Friedhelm was extending his passionate invitations to Astrid, Leti coldly called out Duke’s attention.

“I remember asking you to bring your *fiancée* or *lover*, but... anyway, I am a generous and understanding master and I will not be saying anything about your preferences as long as you do your job well.”

Duke understood the meaning behind Leti's words and decided to clear up any misconceptions she was forming inside her head.

“One, I do not have a fiancée or a lover. And two, I brought Astrid here as my companion to have someone to talk to ‘cause I’m quite sure there’d be no place for me in a tea party for the Royal Family.”

“Oh, I see.”

The relief on Leti's face only added to his vexation.

² Seventh Heaven: Friedhelm’s own chivalric order

“You need not to worry since I have everything arranged. You shall be at the adult’s table. Think of this as a way to train your junior.”

Duke’s table, as Leti promised, was composed of the older guests in the party. The youngest was sixteen and the oldest was three-and-twenty. However, with a table composed of Friedhelm, Leonhardt, Duke, and Astrid, finding a common topic for conversation was impossible.

“Duke-senpai! The tea is amazing! This is the first time I’ve drunk a tea this fragrant and smooth.”

“...Good for you.”

... ..

“Let’s just say this is better than having Guido-ani’ue³ here as well.”

Leonhardt’s words were indeed true, for if Guido were to join them, the atmosphere would no longer pass as awkward – it would automatically be a unanimous decision to just go home.

“Well, I’ll just go and have a heart-to-heart talk with my younger brothers.”

³ Ani’ue: A Japanese honorific used to address one’s older brother. More old-fashioned than the common Onii-san

Leonhardt escaped the awkward atmosphere and moved to a different table, carrying his teacup and some snacks. At least now, the group could have small talk. Duke threw Friedhelm a topic.

“...Your highness, are you in good terms with Princess Leticia?”

“Of course not. She just invited me here as an apology to what she did a while back.”

“Apology?”

“For serving me a goblet of water when I visited her.”

“Aaaah...”

Duke commented as if it were something astonishing with a wry smile, and looked at the same Leti who poured the goblet of water talking with the younger guests at a different table.

“All of them are your siblings?”

“No. There are some cousins. But truthfully, not seeing us as siblings despite being one just shows how much of a bad older brother I am. I’ve got to admit, she has the advantage on this one.”

Duke could not hide his surprise at Friedhelm’s words. He sounded like he was giving Leti credit and recognizing her for it. Friedhelm gave Duke a wry smile, admitting it was the truth.

“It’s not like I only think of myself, you know? The country is my top priority... I don’t want to divide the kingdom and start a war.”

Friedhelm still could not completely rid himself of the pride he held as the first-born prince. He grew up being told that he would be the one succeeding the throne – of course he could not accept it if Guido took the crown, but he was ready to convince himself for Leti. But he had a condition: Leti would be a good ruler, or else he would bring her down. That was Friedhelm’s condition, his point of compromise.

“I think Your Highness will also be a good ruler.”

“‘Also,’ huh? Wonder who the other one is... Anyway, I gratefully accept your compliment.”

Hearing the conversation over at the men’s table, Leti turned around and pointed in their direction. Holding the hand of a small, young lady, Leti approached their table.

“Astrid, could you act as her practice partner for introductions?”

“Me-me-me...me?”

Astrid was surprised at the sudden request.

“The best partner is someone she does not know. The nervousness that comes with it is nearly the same as the real one. Well then...”

“Uhhh... It is a pleasure to meet you. I am Misty Fal Edelle.”

Misty gathered her skirts to the side, raised it a bit, and bent her knees in a curtsy.

“I am Astrid Gale, Knight of the Tenth Rank of the Royal Chivalric Order. It is an honor to meet you.”

Astrid took Misty’s hand to kiss it, but it was awkward due to the difference in their height.

“Astrid, you’ve got to kneel down and meet her eyes,” Friedhelm said.

“Oh, right. Pardon me.”

Following Friedhelm’s advice, Astrid knelt down, then chastely placed a kiss on Misty’s dainty hand. Misty looked up at Leti with sparkling eyes, waiting for her approval that she had done it well.

“You were excellent.”

Misty’s face glowed upon hearing Leti’s praise and having her head patted. Even Duke could not help it but smile at such a heartwarming scene.

“Friedhelm-onii-sama⁴, carry me!”

⁴ Onii-sama: Onii =Older Brother | Sama = formal honorific for a high person

In an instant, their table was surrounded by the royal children pulling Friedhelm's arm, begging him to play with them. Friedhelm gave in to their requests and stood up.

“We’re gonna take turns, line up! Remember, your cool brother is no longer that young, so don’t push me too hard. Astrid, come and help me.”

“Yes, sir!”

Friedhelm and Astrid carried and swung the children in the spacious garden. Leti, freed from the role of looking after the young ones, took a seat beside Duke.

“Was it fine to invite Prince Friedhelm alone? Weren’t you going to keep the balance?”

“I will invite Prince Guido next time, though I know not if he will come.”

“Next time? I thought this tea party was to celebrate your recovery?”

“Well, it is, partly – but this party is really a regular event I host once a month to train my younger siblings how to comport themselves. If they learn and acquire the necessary manners needed early on, they will develop these as habits and will no longer be embarrassed or awkward when they go out into society. You are welcome to join us.”

Duke could not reconcile this kind and caring older sister Leti with the high-handed queen he encountered on a regular basis. But this kind older sister was the reason why the neutral faction held the majority of the royal children.

“...No, this one time is enough. I feel so out of place here.”

“You should get used to these kind of events. You cannot keep on saying that when you become my knight.”

“How many times do I have to I tell you? I have no intention of becoming your knight.”

Duke always corrected Leti whenever she snuck that suggestion in. With those statements from her becoming more and more frequent, he remembered someone who sounded just like her. Yes, Leti was very much like her older brother Friedhelm, who was currently playing with his younger siblings.

“The two of you really are brother and sister. Especially that independent attitude you both have, and your tendency not to listen to what others are saying.”

“I get that quite a lot. That I look a lot like Prince Guido outside, but inside I am similar with Prince Friedhelm. But I am really connected to them only by half... I think I should wrap this up. This is no longer study but play time.”

Leti gathered everyone and said that it was time to go home. She led each child back to either their nurses or governesses, leaving only the adult group behind.

The tea party started and ended peacefully without any problems. For Leti, this tea party was not just a mere gathering. It was a carefully calculated plan that was executed to meet certain objectives: one – to teach her younger siblings, two – to deepen her friendship with Duke, and three – a chance to repair her relationship with her older brother. Now that the tea party was over, she concluded this plan as a success and started to give her closing greetings.

“Thank you very much for coming today. I hope...”

The leaves on the tree rustled behind Leti, and then everything else happened in a flash.

Friedhelm pulled Leti closer to him, Duke stood in front to protect them, and Astrid took out his sword.

Leti was surprised with the sudden turn of events, but she remained calm, surprised but not scared, and she peered at Astrid through the space between Friedhelm’s arms.

“Senpai! Cover for me please.”

Astrid walked along the sides of the table and grabbed an empty cup. He threw the cup to the tree, aiming for the part where the branches were still shaking. But the cup hit a branch and broke

into pieces. Then, to everyone’s surprise, they heard a high-pitched cry and a black lump of mass fell on Astrid.

“Uwahuwawawah!”

Astrid caught the soft, black fur ball. It had large circular eyes and a long tail. The only word to describe the fallen creature was...

“This... looks... like... a cat.”

“Let’s still check. Astrid, climb up.”

“Ah, roger! Please hold the cat.”

Astrid deftly climbed up the tree and confirmed that there was nothing else on top. He jumped straight down to the ground and landed perfectly on his feet.

“Glad it’s just a cat, right? I was utterly surprised. Both with the cat and how good your cooperation was! Why don’t the three of you just be Ane’ue’s⁵ knights? *Ahababa!*”

Leonhardt’s words, poking fun at them, brought the three men back to their senses. Friedhelm quickly let go of Leti and distanced himself from the sister he was protecting in his arms, and Duke awkwardly moved his hand up and down the handle of the sword he was holding in battle stance.

⁵ Ane’ue: A Japanese honorific used to address one’s older sister. More old-fashioned than the common Onee-san

“This is just my knight’s instinct at work, you see...”

“Oh, I see...” Leti said.

“And I just move on instinct. You see, Guido has been targeting me for a while and...”

“Oh, yes, I see...” Leti agreed with Friedhelm.

“I’m glad you’re safe, Your Highness. Ah! Sorry for breaking the cup!”

“That’s fine. Thank you for saving me.”

Duke and Friedhelm sighed, both thinking that they were idiots. If they just acted the way Astrid did and honestly told Leti that they were glad she was safe, then that would’ve been the end of it. But no, they had to let their egos get in the way and make ridiculous excuses.

“Aaah, I get it. Gimme the cat. I’ll go find someplace I can leave it. The tea and snacks were delicious. See ya!” Friedhelm said as he took the cat by its nape and walked away. Then they heard Friedhelm shout, likely because the cat scratched his face. It looked like both of them were not being honest with themselves.

Putting aside the older brother whose relationship with Leti still needed to be patched up, Leti looked at the men left. Leti saw Leonhardt busy helping Astrid take off the cat fur stuck on Astrid’s knight uniform, and then she faced Duke.

“Duke, thank you.”

Duke did not know how to respond to Leti's unexpected word of thanks. He could not retort with “be grateful” since he already said a while back that it was all his knight’s instinct at work.

“That... That was nothing.”

“Better accept my gratitude while you still can, because I do not have any intention of thanking you once you become my knight.”

“Why do you keep on saying that?”

Duke pressed his temples with his fingers, screaming inside, wondering why in the world Leti could not understand him.

“Hey, didn’t you see Astrid a while ago? He’s a good knight, isn’t he? He is a commoner and maybe a bit too young, but his skills are top-notch within the Order. And based on what I see, he’s pretty willing to be your knight. So why don’t you just give up on me and take Astrid instead?”

“Astrid Gale... Indeed, he is a good knight, but...”

Astrid was a good knight, and even Leonhardt recommended him. So Leti had asked for him to be investigated, and she came up with a conclusion based on that information.

“I do not have the confidence to control him. He is no ordinary knight and it might become troublesome.”

“...Oi.”

“I was incessantly told by my great-great-great-great uncle to train my eyes in discerning people, so I am quite confident with it – that is why I chose you.”

Leti did not say anything else; her silence declared that this conversation was over. Duke, on the other hand was secretly astonished at how perceptive Leti was. He had also thought that Astrid Gale was no ordinary commoner. Astrid had not said a word about it, but having seen him – a novice knight – kill without flinching, Duke had thought Astrid might have worked as a mercenary before. And Leti had noticed that immediately. Indeed, Duke could no longer see Leti as a sheltered princess.

Leti nonchalantly walked towards the tree Astrid climbed, looking up its height. She stepped forward to the tree and her heels made soft knock. There was one thing that the other men did not notice, but Leti did, because of the fact she was the only one who underwent the rigorous training of being a perfect lady.

‘If he can kill the sound of his footsteps at such a height...I can only conclude not so good things about him.’

One of the things required of an accomplished lady was to be able to gracefully dance the waltz. Evening balls would have dancing, and dancing included waltzing, so not being able to do it was unacceptable for any lady of good breeding. Moreover, to claim the title of an excellent dancer, one had to glide and move

like a fairy – gracefully and silently. A dancer with noisy feet was found to be vulgar and barbaric.

“...I guess he is someone to be wary of.”

The tea party Leti hosted as training for her younger siblings, as a way to deepen her relationship with Duke, and as an opportunity to repair her relationship with her brother ended up leaving uneasiness and worry upon its conclusion.

One clear and fine day, a cheery Leonhardt came to visit Leti's room, saying that her tutor had arrived. He handed her a light overcoat. Leti had a bad feeling about where this was going, so she asked Leonhardt what this was all about before putting it on.

“Well, we're currently airing the scrolls of the artifact inventory and you, Ane'ue, are most welcome to join us.”

“Is that related, in any way, to my lessons?”

“Ehhh... uhmm... ah! I'll explain which are owned by our family and so on... plus, plus we also have in there one of our national treasures! The original manuscript of the book on the Knight King's legends! You know, the one about him fighting Evil?”

“You are the only one who would get excited about that. Anyway, I understand. I shall lend you a hand.”

Leti reluctantly wore the coat and gloves and helped in taking out the ancient scrolls. Doing such work made Leti asked why copies of it weren't made, but they answered that it would be a problem if the original ones had molds. Leti, seeing the logic in it, agreed as she dusted off a sheet and laid it neatly on the wooden stand.

“Don't you find it interesting that the Knight King's sword and the phantom twelve Promise Swords are included in the list?”

“Well, is it?”

“Think about this: putting aside the question if they are real or not, we have the age-old, rusted and worn out Knight Sword owned by the Knight King Christian himself, but the twelve Promise Swords said to have been granted to his knights are nowhere to be found. So here's the interesting part, at least for a historian. Why did Administrative King Karlheinz include the Promise Swords in his inventory? Was it just for the sake of an idea, an impossible dream? Or was it because those swords indeed existed during that time and are only lost now? Interesting, right? *Abababa!*”

Leonhardt showed Leti the sheet containing the swords. Indeed, the Knight King's sword and the Promise Swords given to his twelve knights were written in the inventory.

“Your beloved King Karlheinz was the one who compiled this inventory, you know? I’m sure this took a lot of his time to do this, but we are really grateful for his efforts.”

“Well, he seems to be the type of person who would like these kind of meticulous tasks.”

Leti was quite certain that the ones who did the actual job were his servants following his orders, but someone who would even come up with an idea like this qualified King Karlheinz as meticulous. She wanted to know the reason why he kept such a list, but she had yet to meet him in his later years, so she hadn’t had the chance to ask him directly in *that* place.

“I haven’t heard that in a while,” Leonhardt said as he opened the book he was holding and brushed off a dead insect’s body.

“Heard what?”

“You speak as if you’re friends with some historical personalities. Don’t you remember you taught me history that way?”

“...Really...”

Leonhardt’s body was weak when he was small, so their mother stayed with him while Leti was left alone most of the time. To overcome that loneliness, she frequented the Knight King’s Space and talked with the his other reincarnations, and when she woke up, she shared the stories they talked about with Leonhardt.

“Your stories were like vivid dramas written by a wonderful historical playwright so I remember them well. I became a historian because I was attracted to those behind-the-scene stories you told me. In other words, it was you who made me become like this. *Ahababa!*”

“Do not put the blame on me.”

Leti took another volume of the inventory, scanning its pages, and her eyes stopped on a particular article.

“Is this book worthy to be included in this list?”

“The original copy, yes. The one available in the Archive is just a replica.”

The article that caught Leti’s attention was a book – a collection of stories on what happened to Lion King Alexander after his dethronement.

According to history, King Alexander’s most trusted friend and Prime Minister lead a revolution against him – killing him in the process. However, one of his loyal knights brought his corpse outside the kingdom and continued to lament for him, so the body of the Lion King was not in the Royal Tomb. Since there was no body and particular location of death, some theories came out saying that he was not dead. Then, during the time of Administrative King Karlheinz, a book compiling those stories was written, and the original copy made its way into the Royal Inventory.

“Is the original one an academic book? I have only read the idiotic book containing unbelievable after-death theories on King Alexander.”

“Exactly as you say, they were all unbelievable stories. Though I find the one saying King Alexander did not die, but continued to live and become a pirate in the Southern Seas and conquered a country, making him their king, the most interesting.”

Hearing Leonhardt say the theories were fictitious stunned Leti. Upon finishing arranging a batch of the inventory, Leti took off the coat and gloves and told him she was done helping them.

Leti started to walk faster towards the Royal Villa. She wanted clean herself since she was still feeling dust all over her despite wearing an overcoat, and she kept brushing it off her dress. She chose to take the route less traveled and passed by people to prevent seeing her in such a disheveled state. However, despite her efforts, a palace guard came out of a corner and bowed his head to her. She continued to walk on, imagining how nice a bath would be, when she stopped sensing anyone around her. She silenced her footsteps and quietly moved toward the presence she felt.

“Isn’t it ‘bout time? The race to the throne is finished. Make up your mind and join Seventh Heaven already. Your seat has yet to be taken.”

Leti heard the voice of her older brother, and he was probably talking with his best friend. She came to the conclusion that the

only thing they would talk about in a deserted place such as this would be their true feelings.

“You’re wasting your time, your talent, and your skills at being an unaffiliated knight.”

“If, as you say, the race for the crown is over, then all the more I should stay under Prince Guido’s faction out of duty. My family may be at the tail end, but we’re still part of the nobility, and that is a complicated world.”

Duke wanted to end the conversation there, but Friedhelm still had something to say.

“I’m surprised you’re still bringing up Guido’s name in this conversation. I was sure it would be Leticia’s.”

“*That* is more unbelievable.”

Duke, feeling as if his defenses were being stripped down, turned his back on Friedhelm, and walked away thinking of how pointless the conversation was. But Friedhelm was not yet done with him.

“Do you know what it means to be Leticia’s knight?”

Friedhelm wrapped his left hand around Duke’s neck.

“If you were ordered to, you’ve got to kill me like this. Can you really do it?”

Friedhelm’s action tested Duke’s friendship with him – and he was testing whether or not Duke was worthy to be Leti’s knight. Leti, on the other hand, let out a silent sigh as she watched the two men’s competition of stubbornness from afar.

“Duke never considered anyone else but you. You are a fool to doubt that.”

Leti wanted to wait for them to go their separate ways, but since their glaring contest seemed like it would last forever, she decided to end it herself.

“Would you please stop harassing my knight?”

“...Leticia.”

“I am not one to intentionally wound other people. If I wanted you dead, I would not ask Duke to do it for me; I would do it myself. Just like this.”

Friedhelm felt the chill of cold metal pressed against the small of his back. He could acutely feel the shuddering cool of the metal but his clothes and skin were still intact. Leti was pressing some kind of blade against him with no hesitation, leaving only his clothes as his shield. One wrong move and he was sure that Leti’s weapon would cut into him.

“At least make your hands shake a little. You really ain’t adorable at all.”

“Shall I make my hands tremble next time?”

Friedhelm raised his hands in surrender, and Leti finally stepped away from him. He turned around to see what her weapon was but she had already hidden it.

“...Well, I guess it is better for you to have a knife to protect yourself. We are supposedly targeting your life, after all.”

“Yes, that is about it. So would you mind going ahead and leaving me to court my knight in private?”

“Yes, yes. See ya ‘round Duke!”

Friedhelm waved his hand in goodbye. To lighten up the mood, Leti jokingly said to Duke that their friendship was quite disturbing. She was also starting to hate that part of herself that was always trying to calm everything down. Being neutral for eight years found a way to ingrain such an attitude in her.

“Where are your guards?”

“I left them inside the treasure room with Leonhardt, who is in heaven right now. Besides, I do not think anyone would be stupid enough to attack me in broad daylight.”

“But still... oh, forget it. I understand perfectly that you’ll listen and literally listen only to what I have to say. Moving on, where exactly did you hide that knife? A girl with a hidden knife is just as disturbing, in my humble opinion.”

Duke was thankful for Leti's kindness in lightening up the mood and changed the topic. He examined Leti's appearance from

head to toe and did not find anything amiss from her usual perfect stance. But just when he was convinced, Leti reached out for the ribbon on her back.

“Hiding a knife in a dress is impossible. That was a spoon.”

“...Huh?”

“It need not be a real blade; anything that can produce the same cold metallic feel when pressed on one’s back can be mistaken as one. Besides, I cannot kill anyone with a spoon no matter how hard I press it against someone.”

Let took out from her ribbon a silver spoon and showed it to Duke. He was dumbfounded by the fact that she really had one, but Leti just shrugged her shoulders at him and returned it to her ribbon.

“You can’t protect yourself with a mere spoon, you know?”

“I know... besides, I do not need a knight; I can protect myself. The only reason why I need one is to fill up all of the posts for the Knights of the Round. So I am here now, bowing my head and begging you to take the first seat.”

“I’ve told you my answer already. And I haven’t seen you bow your head to me,” Duke instantly retorted, but restrained himself from saying anything else that could lead the conversation astray.

“I’m perfectly aware how brave and intelligent you are, but you should also know that sometimes those qualities alone are not enough to deal with the situation.”

“Are you worried about me?”

“...Yes. If anything happens to the kingdom’s future queen, it’ll be a huge catastrophe.”

Duke’s reply was still unsure and not honest with himself, but Leti said that such a reply would do for now. She walked away and left Duke alone.

“Them being close friends makes things complicated.”

Leti was not demanding Duke to be her knight in the truest sense of the word – a knight that would swear his life and loyalty to his master. But she knew well that Duke couldn’t be anything else but a true knight.

“Lion King Alexander and Revolution King Julius were best friends, too. King Julius betrayed King Alexander, but King Alexander never found it in his heart to hate his friend. That proves how strong their bond was, and I am sure that what Duke and Onii-sama has is the same.”

Leti’s feet stopped, wondering whether or not she really had what it took to break into that bond.

‘If only I had the qualities Friedhelm Onii-sama has, qualities suited to be the king, then...’

Leti shook her head, driving away the negative thoughts, and told herself that there wasn’t anything good in wishing for something she did not have. She only had to give her best efforts to be her ideal self.

“I will not give up on you, Duke. Not until you are the one that will come to me, crawling and begging to be my knight. I will not stop.”

Duke might have shouted, “Give me a break!” if he heard Leti's encouragement for herself.

Duke, completely ignorant of Leti's newfound determination, went back to camp to take his meal. The food from the camp’s cafeteria was quite decent in taste and generous with the servings. Upon taking his seat, he fiddled with the unused spoon and fork with his fingers.

“Senpai?”

Duke pressed the spoon on Astrid’s back, befuddling his junior by his actions.

“Astrid, what is this I’m pressing on your back?”

“Eh...? A spoon? A fork? ...A spoon.”

“How did you know?”

“It would be pricklier if it were a fork.”

Duke removed the spoon from Astrid, then took the fork in his hands. He agreed with Astrid’s answer and asked another question.

“Then you wouldn’t mistake a spoon for a knife?”

“That’s a bit hard to identify. I mean both have round tips...”

“Round? I don’t mean a dining knife, I mean a weapon, like a short blade.”

Astrid thought of what Duke said.

“I don’t think I’d make a mistake on that. But maybe the presence, the impression can change it.”

“Right...”

Now it was Duke’s turn to think. Leti said it was a spoon, but was it really a spoon? She also said the same thing before, that it was a spoon that broke his cup⁶, but he was not really convinced.

“This is the second time I felt that there’s something different about her. I can no longer convince myself that everything was my imagination.”

Duke felt that Leti was hiding something, and that something was definitely not a spoon.

⁶ See Chapter I.



“An art inventory? That sounds like a very tiresome thing to do.”

Leti asked the young Administrative Karlheinz she met in the Knight King’s Space today about the inventory list, but the young King still hadn’t thought about it.

“But I can think of several reasons why I would do such a thing. One of them is to aid in destroying Ghost Energies that sometimes pose as art pieces. I may have come up with that idea to help the next reincarnation of the Knight King, as sometimes the interval between one is long.”

“Ghost Energy?” Leti and Heart-broken King Ludgar asked in unison.

King Ludgar was a reincarnation of the Knight King after Leti’s time. He would be leaving great accomplishments in his name, and he had a proper posthumous title worthy of those. But the countless number of times his heart was broken left a mark in history, earning him his other title of the Heart-broken King, to which he was more known for – or so Leti had heard from later kings after him.

“Ghost Energies are artifacts from the Knight King Christian’s time. These are imitations of the twelve Promise Swords King

Christian granted to his knights – in other words, weapons created by his enemies to defeat him. But these Ghost Energies have a flaw, so they were later known as cursed items.”

“What is their flaw? Do they suck life?”

“Yes. Ghost Energy can give its user the strongest power they desire by converting the user’s life force. Thus, these items are branded as cursed by those who knew nothing. Most people die in half a year after harnessing its power.”

Karlheintz story provided the source of the cursed articles coming out in stories. Leti nodded as she knew another of history’s secrets.

“Ghost Energies no longer exist in our time, don’t they? Creepy,” Heart-broken King Ludgar said, shrugging his shoulders.

“I believe most of them were already destroyed in King Alexander’s and my time, but there might have been one or two left in your time, Queen Leticia.”

“How shall I deal with it?”

“Well, you...”



“...Intruder!”

Leti jolted up, took the short blade hidden under her pillow, and looked around. She only had to stall the intruder until her

guards came, and besides, she could protect herself even if they came in late.

“Someone, come here quickly!” Leti cried out in the dark to her guards, who were supposed to be right outside her room.

Suddenly, she felt a strong, murderous intent. She lifted the darkness with something unseen, and then a shrill sound came, followed by knives – but neither touched Leti, for she was surrounded by something shielding her from the knives, leaving them on the floor.

“Don’t tell me you’re...” The assassin murmured in the darkness. Leti felt as if she had seen the sharp, piercing green eyes of the assassin. His voice sounded familiar as well. She frantically searched her memory to piece the information together.

“I am what?”

“You’re the kni...”

“Your Highness! Are you safe!?”

The assassin chose to retreat when he heard the voices of the guards. He quietly climbed down the window where he seemed to have entered from.

“Your Highness!”

The guards came rushing into the dark room, but Leti answered calmly that she was fine.

“The intruder ran away through the window. Station a guard by it and then contact the Order. Tell them to go after him, though I doubt they can catch him.”

Leti gave her orders one after the other and drove her guards out of her room. She cut several wounds on herself using the assassin’s knives, and she scattered those on top of the sheets to make it look like she used them as her shield. She wouldn’t want people to wonder how she was able to evade all of the knives in the dark.

“*Argh!* And we were in the middle of talking about Ghost Energy.”

Leti still didn’t know what kinds of things were considered as Ghost Energy or how to destroy one. But since she hadn’t heard any news pertaining to cursed items, she could simply ask King Karlheinz again about this topic on a later date.

“Your Highness, we have come to clean your room. Shall we prepare a different room for you to rest?”

“No, thank you. It is a bit early, but I shall continue on with my day. Could you prepare tea for me?”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

If she were being honest, Leti wanted to lie down and sleep again, but decided against it. After all, today was an important day for her.

“But to think I am going to start this day like this...”

Leti’s day started with almost getting killed. She didn’t feel good about it, but decided to put it on the side so as not to ruin the rest of her day. Today was the day she was given permission to attend, or rather to observe, from the inside the Kingdom’s politics. She was allowed to join the morning sessions to show her how the Kingdom was run. Her two older brothers had attended several sessions already, but she was never given the chance to join, since they thought that she would be given to some other country or a powerful member of the peerage as a bride, and there would be no use even if she did join the meetings.

A king’s day was normally composed of meetings in the morning, and official visits and holding audience with his subjects in the afternoon. As of this day, Leti would be taking part in some of these responsibilities. Her mornings would be spent in the main castle more, and her afternoons would be slowly filled with visits around the kingdom as the King’s representative. It was also highly possible that she would play a bigger role in foreign affairs by going on diplomatic visits in the name of the Kingdom.

“But diplomacy and foreign affairs management is best suited for Prince Friedhelm.”

One, he was handsome. He was such a beautiful lad, and his amicability and friendliness radiate from his face. Two, he was open-minded and had the charisma to attract people around him. Leti thought it’d be better to leave foreign affairs with him. He

probably did not realize it since it was so natural for him, but he had this part of him that could make people feel safe and believe that everything would be fine if they left it to him. This was something innate in him, and no amount of effort could make one attain it.

“Prince Guido is ideal for internal administration; he is just the perfect Prime Minister type.”

Compared with First Prince Friedhelm, who was suited for foreign affairs, Second Prince Guido would be better working on the internal affairs of the Kingdom with his detailed planning and the needed drive to execute the plan flawlessly. He’d fare better with managing the taxes, or planning and giving the instructions for ceremonies, rather than weathering through the unpredictable tides of foreign affairs. These tasks required flexibility and versatility in dealing the situation. He could simply gain the trust of the people as he worked along the way, completing one task after the other.

Leti could easily think of reasons why her two older brothers could be the better kings, but she did not envy them, rather...

“...If the three of us can just cooperate and rule the kingdom together, Sommevesle will be stable...”

If the three of them would help each other in ruling the kingdom, maybe they’d even get the “Sibling Kings” posthumous title. Leti gathered the hem of her gown and started walking as she thought of the impossible future she was secretly hoping for.

“That is for all today. Session adjourned.”

Leti wondered how many names she had taken down in her mental diary during the session. Around half of the cabinet ministers were in foul moods, and dozed off during the meeting. The man beside her kept saying things off the point, and then the other members would follow in their own irritating opinions. If the sessions were always like this, then Leti was sure she’d really be known as the Rant Queen. She hid behind her papers her twitching, forced smile and straightened the appearing creases in between her eyebrows.

‘Seniority is... plain troublesome. The worst part is that I cannot do anything about the stupid ones that only have high statuses... Well, I really cannot do much about low-ranking stupid members, either.’

Despite all that, Leti was aware of her own shortcomings. Her plate was already full just by quietly attending the meeting, trying to read in between the lines and planning what to do for the future.

“Princess Leticia!”

“How may I help you, Earl Brightkreutz?”

“If it pleases you, would you like to join me for luncheon after this? We may talk about the proceedings this morning...”

Leti answered that she'd be glad to join him and placed her hand on the young earl's offered left arm, despite knowing the fact that her complaints in her diary would increase. She just convinced herself that making the connection now with Earl Brightkreutz, a young man few years older than her, might prove to be useful in the future.

“I see I cannot be a Lion King or an Administrative King...”

“Pardon me?”

Leti's soft whisper did not reach the earl's ear and she replied with a smile that it was nothing.

I cannot be like Lion King Alexander, who can gallantly round up matters, nor be a genius like Administrative King Karlheinz, who was able to continue to execute internal reforms and external revolutions even after losing his wife, who was his partner in life.'

Leti mockingly thought of herself as a half-baked queen in comparison to the past and future reincarnations of the Knight King. She could only be a queen whose sole talents were to skillfully manipulate people of talent to work for her and return whatever trust is given to her.

Duke wanted to say it was all a coincidence. It really was. He was just out in town for patrol duties when he saw a golden-haired lady. Even he didn’t want to believe that the said blonde lass he saw was Her Highness, Princess Leticia, roaming around town and, of course, without her guards. Duke knew at once that she was out for her incognito walk. He wanted to scold her right at once, but they were not in the right place and nor was he in the position to, so he had second thoughts on calling out to her.

“Is she headed to the North Cemetery? Visiting someone there?”

The North Cemetery was where the Royal family was laid to rest, and no outsiders were allowed to go there. At the deepest part of the cemetery was the basement where the Kings of the past lay. One day, Leti, too, would be placed there for her eternal rest. It wouldn’t be peculiar to find her there; no one would scold her if they saw her there. Besides, it was a no trespassing area, but there weren’t real guards stationed, so it had become a playground for children who did not know what *treason* meant yet.

Duke couldn’t decide whether he should call her or not, but by the time he had made up his mind, his shadow was already long and the sun was beginning to set. He had lingered on his decision for far too long.

“Lady Cia! I wouldn’t mind if you wanted to stay here as long as you want to if you have your guards with you. But if you are

alone, I think it'd be better for you to go home now while there is still light.”

Leti, having spaced out, was surprised when she saw Duke by her side, their long shadows standing close to each other. She, unusually, agreed silently and started walking after giving a slight bow to pay her respects to the grave.

“I did not plan to stay long, but look at the time.”

Leti seemed tired, for her steps lacked their usual spirit. Duke normally did not have to adjust his pace for Leti, but today, he had to walk a bit slowly.

‘Her Highness just turned seventeen last month right... She’s too young.’

Those her age normally felt lost or confused and had a lot of things going on inside their heads. Of course it was natural to feel those things, especially for someone like her, who was carrying such big responsibilities.

“Are you worried about something?” Duke made sure that his question sounded nonchalant.

Leti replied with a sigh, “I was just disappointed with myself, that’s all. So disappointed that I was nearly able to convince myself why I am called the Leftover Princess.”

“Those who stand on top have great responsibilities to bear. That is also the reason why they have to complain sometimes, to have someone that’ll listen to them... I’m willing to be the wind

now, you know?” Duke’s kind and understanding voice said those words as if he were an older brother persuading his younger sister to tell him her fears. Leti faltered for a moment because of that, but it only lasted for a moment, for strength came back quickly in her eyes. Her eyes sparked, showing Duke that there was no need for his help.

“That stubbornness you’ve got there inside you does not suite a beautiful young lady... but that is exactly what a ruler needs. I am sure you will be a great queen.”

Duke’s casual words touched Leti’s heart.

‘You keep on refusing my invitation to be knight and yet you know and tell me the words I desire to hear the most...I hate this situation. It just makes me want to have you as my knight even more!’

Releasing her sentiments made Leti feel a little bit better, and her steps naturally got lighter. Duke was relieved to see the usual spirit back in Leti’s steps. And just as she was coming back to her normal self, Duke walked quickly and stood in front of her. Three members of the Order, Duke’s colleagues, waved at him.

“Why should it be him!?”

If they had just been normal Order knights, then he could easily tell them that he was an escort to Princess Leticia. But unfortunately, some of them were under Guido’s faction. If they found out about Leti going out of the castle *alone*... He could only think of ominous things awaiting her.

“Duke! Hitting on girls while on duty, are we?”

“Of course not!”

Duke covered Leti with his back and wished for his colleagues to go away. Leti, on the other hand, was preparing for the worst. If the need arose, she would voluntarily reveal her identity and admit that she was out on a date with Duke to cover up her incognito walks.

“...Hey, just play along and don’t move,” Duke whispered in Leti’s ears.

Leti turned around to face Duke when he slowly wrapped his left arm to her waist and placed his right hand on her neck. Before Leti could ask him what he was doing, Duke leaned in closer and covered her face with his. Duke’s fellow knights yelled at him with jest – exactly how Duke expected them to react.

“Sorry guys, but as you can see, I’m in the middle of a date. So don’t interrupt us.”

Duke, with all his might, buried Leti’s face into his chest, shielding her face from their sight. With this, the only information they’d have on the lady was her golden locks. None would be the wiser that the lady was Princess Leticia.

“Wow! Being showy, aren’t we?”

“We get it, Duke. Take all the time you need.”

People liked to snoop their noses if something were being kept a secret, but flaunt it and they’d be the ones to back out. Duke finally relaxed when his colleagues were in a distance far enough for them not to notice Leti’s face.

“Oi, we’re coming home. *Now*. Things like that might happen again, so you’d better stop going out of the castle alone.” Duke warned Leti, who he was still holding in his arms.

Leti looked up at him, and with all her might, punched him in the stomach. He unconsciously leaned forward, gasping for breath as he struggled to identify what, exactly, hit him.

“What...the...heck...are you doing?”

“This is not about what I am doing. This is about what you did!”

His thoughts hadn’t even cleared yet when he felt a stinging pain on his cheeks. The punch was followed by a slap delivered by Leti’s delicate hand. The only thing Duke could do was to clench his teeth. He, teary-eyed from the pain, looked up at Leti – her face was flushed and her body was shaking in anger.

“...It was just an act! Pretend!” Duke answered in his defense when he understood what all of this was for.

“You were too close!”

“Getting that close was not a big deal. You are seventeen. I won’t believe you if you say you haven’t had any experience with

this sort of thing. Prince Friedhelm was playing to his heart's content at your age.”

“Don't underestimate a sheltered maiden's inexperience! And don't you ever group me again with my stupid brother!”

Duke was surprised upon hearing Leti's roundabout way of saying she did not have any experience in kissing.

“Huh?”

Leti raised her hand to give Duke another slap because of his exclamation but he was able to catch her hand before a slap landed on his other cheek.

“I... I understand now. So let's just have a truce. The punch was for the kiss act, and the slap for my thoughtless remarks. Deal?”

“I actually punched you to slap you, so technically it is considered as one move... But, oh well... Deal.”

Leti's move was a one-two combination. She had punched Duke to deal with the height difference so when he leaned forward, Leti could slap him. Duke silently cursed the person who taught her such a high-skilled self-defense move. He would probably never know that it was his best friend, Friedhelm, who taught her that.

“A princess cannot easily marry anyone, right? Even the one they love? So you’d better try and play a bit before you marry. I know you can get whoever you want.”

“Oh yes. You just played me a while ago.”

“Quit saying it that way! That was different and you already know that!”

They went back to castle while exchanging sneaky remarks at each other. When they reached their usual parting place, Leti turned around to face Duke and remembered that she had something to ask him.

“An assassin came to attack me this morning and he said some parting words to me. What do you think follows, ‘Don’t tell me you’re the...’ The first syllable is *na*. He didn’t get to finish it.”

“What? An assassin!? Then what in the world are you doing out here alone!? This is dangerous! I’ll escort you until the Royal Villa!”

“You are exaggerating. This is not first time such a thing has happened. There is no need to make a fuss out of it. So what do you think?”

But Duke could not possibly think and come up with an answer for Leti’s question. He was much more concerned about the assassin’s attack than what Leti was asking. Leti regretted telling Duke about the attack when she saw his troubled

expression. She could have just directly asked him her question without any prelude. Duke may look scary with his big frame and usually dour expression, but he was a really kind person to the core, and Leti's words made him worry a lot.

“...Hmmm... Don't tell me... you're the... knight-less princess?” he suggested.

“Ah, I see.”

So the confused Duke came up with an answer, but it did not help Leti at all. She coldly said thanks to Duke for his meaningless answer and climbed up the wall.

“Oi, you'd better get a skilled knight to stay by your side, even just a temporary one. You can get Astrid!”

“I heard your warning, heard it. Nothing more, nothing less.”

Let jumped down to the other side of the wall, and she was no longer visible to Duke. He made a stern face at how Leti was so used to climbing up and going down.

“What the heck are her guards doing? If I were your knight, I certainly wouldn't let you go anywhere alone...”

Duke shook his head the moment words left his lips, trying to deny the fact that he thought of something he'd do if he were Leti's knight.

“It’s natural to worry... I’m no longer a stranger, of course I will...”

Duke pretended not to notice the budding answer inside him. Rather, he convinced himself that he wouldn’t get involved any further.

The Cattleya Court, a part of the Royal Palace, was where the Queen Consorts lived. Men were restricted in this area, so Leti had to leave her guards by the entrance. She had already finished her business inside, so she was strolling along the garden on her way back to the entrance where her guards were waiting for her. However, rain clouds were starting to gather, so she started to quicken her pace. Today’s weather was not good for a stroll.

“Oh, berries are already ripe and sweet during this season...”

Leti was debating with herself where to start the activity with her younger sisters – whether it would be from making the jam, or if she should prepare the jam in advance and start with making the snacks. Then her feet stopped upon seeing a man inside the Court.

Men are technically not allowed here, but princes are exceptions. Has he come to visit Queen Rosalind’?

⁷ Friedhelm’s mother. Third Queen Consort.

But Prince Friedhelm did not seem to be going towards that direction. It looked more like he was using Cattleya Court as shortcut. Leti hesitated for a moment, but made up her mind to call him.

“Prince Friedhelm, do you hate berries?”

“Berries?”

Recently, the only conversation they have had was about Friedhelm’s recommended husband candidates. Since Leti did not hide her irritation on the topic, she obviously avoided Friedhelm. So he was, indeed, surprised that Leti was the one initiating the conversation.

“I like them.”

“Good. It shall be berries then.”

“Sorry, but I don’t get it.”

“I will be making some sweets with our little sisters, and I figured you might be troubled if you received something you hate, so I wanted to confirm it with you.”

“Oh, I see. But you didn’t have to worry about that. I won’t tell them straight at their faces I hate it even though I really do. I can deal with that situation with a smile plastered on my face.”

“Oh, right. I forgot.” Leti said those words as if she was admiring Friedhelm’s thoughtfulness.

“I wonder if Prince Guido likes them as well.”

“Isn’t he banning sweets ‘cause it’s just a waste?”

“But I have to give one to him if I will be giving you one, lest it become troublesome. I just hope he will accept it with a smile.”

“A sneer, most likely. He’s good at doing that.”

The conversation they were having was good; they were able to have a normal one. Now, if she could just talk with him like this more, then they’d have wider topics to cover, and maybe, in time, she could ask for his cooperation politically.

“How about Duke and Astrid? They also told me they wanted to give one to the two knights who attended the last tea party.”

“I think Duke’s fine, but I’m not quite sure about Astrid. I can go and ask Duke about Astrid; I’m on my way to meet him.”

“You are going to meet with Duke? Then I shall come with you.”

So Leti and Friedhelm were on their way to meet Duke. Following lazy Friedhelm’s lead meant that Leti would go around the Royal Palace without her guards, whom she left at the entrance of Cattleya Court, because Friedhelm’s intended route would go out to the other side. She was thinking of an excuse for her guards when she saw the handrails of the corridor marking the Court’s boundaries.

“Do you always use this route?”

Leti frowned at Friedhelm as he nimbly climbed over the handrails.

“This is the shortest way. Here, lemme give you a hand.”

“There is no need.”

Leti rejected Friedhelm’s help and climbed down the wall with agility by herself. Of course, the low handrails were nothing compared to the high palace walls she easily climbed up and down for her incognito walks.

“Well, well, well. We shouldn’t be calling you the Leftover Princess! ‘Tomboy Princess’ should be better for you.”

“I think ‘that’s my sister’ would have been better for this case.”

Their exchange of meaningless banter was a normal thing. After they had moved a few steps into the Castle, Leti heard a voice calling her from behind, so she turned around to have a look.

“What is the matter?”

“Well...” answered the maid. Her voice and face clearly showed that it was something difficult for her to speak of until Leti and Friedhelm noticed nearly at the same time what the purpose of the maid was.

“Move out!”

Friedhelm pulled Leti's arm and shielded her from the approaching paper knife the maid wielded. The knife cut not Leti, but the back of Friedhelm’s hand.

“Your hand...”

“Just a scratch. Darn it! We just went out of a sword-prohibited zone and this happens!”

Some parts of the royal palace prohibited carrying of any weapons, such as the Throne Room and Assembly Halls. These were called sword-prohibited zones, and only the palace guards were allowed to carry one. This rule was decided during King Alexander’s time to prevent violence during meetings and discussions. There had been an incident during his time where the discussion during the meeting became too heated and the members ended up drawing their swords.

Friedhelm thought he could easily finish his business, so he did not bother bringing his sword. To add to that, his knights, the Seventh Heaven, were nowhere near the vicinity since he passed through Cattleya Court. He was frantically thinking of what he could use as a weapon when he remembered the time that Leti threatened him.

“You carry a knife with you, right? Lend that to me.”

“I only have a spoon.”

“Spoon!? ...Was the same thing you used on me?”

“I will not deny it.”

Friedhelm shouted in frustration. He was fooled by Leti, by a spoon. Nonetheless, he was on his guard shielding Leti should the maid lunge again. Leti was also thinking of how they should deal with this.

“I don’t have any choice...You can protect yourself, right? On my signal, run as fast as you can towards the gates. Not towards Cattleya Court.”

But Leti shook her head in disagreement. The maid might just be a diversion, and it was still not clear who the real target was.

“I do not think separating is a good thing. But can you do something about her if I cause a diversion?”

“Haven’t fought a paper knife before but I’ll try.”

This would’ve been easy if Leti was alone. Well, it would still be easy if it were fine for her to be *seen* by her brother, but to deal a certain amount of damage to the maid while not exposing herself to was difficult.

“Then, step back and watch. You probably don’t know it, but my fighting skills were at par with Duke’s during our Academy days.”

And these were not just words. Friedhelm tackled the maid and took the knife away from her.

“Bravo! I would have asked you to be my knight if you were not a prince.”

“It was my pleasure. Make sure to thank me later!” Friedhelm arrogantly hummed as he took the ribbon from Leti’s hair and tied the maid’s feet.

“Got any other ribbons?”

“I do.”

Leti untied the one wrapped around her waist and gave it to Friedhelm. The spoon hidden in it fell with a clang.

“You really *do* have a spoon...”

“I can only hide that much, though I guess I can learn a thing or two from her and try hiding a knife.”

Friedhelm, after tying up the maid, stood up and looked at the wound on his left hand. The bleeding already stopped, and the cut was not deep.

“The paper knife was a blind spot. It isn’t a weapon but a tool, though still enough to hurt. And to think it was in here in the Royal Palace.”

Friedhelm picked up the knife that was lying on the floor. It had an intricate and peculiar design.

“Take a look this. This might be worth a fortune. The design might even date back to King Christian’s time!”

“Is it that old?”

“These carving patterns are particular for that era. This might have originally been a weapon, like a dagger of sorts, and was changed to a paper knife. I can imagine that this item is worthy to be a national treasure, but was overlooked by King Karlheinz when he was doing his inventory since it had been used normally within the castle.”

Leti listened to Friedhelm’s hypothesis about the paper knife and agreed with his conclusion, but she felt she was missing the point even though she already had the necessary information, and couldn’t connect the dots.

‘A former dagger from the Knight King’s era... Redesigned as a paperknife and overlooked by Administration King’s inventory...’

Thinking of the events chronologically didn’t help her, so maybe she had to look at this from a different standpoint...

‘Why did King Karlheinz do the inventory...? To destroy ghost energies posing as art works...!’

“Drop that!” Leti shouted. If it had been a weapon during King Christian’s time, then it was possible.

Friedhelm was surprised with Leti’s cry and tried to let go of the paper knife, but his hand would not listen to him.

“Huh? What’s this?”

“This really is...”

Leti reached out to Friedhelm’s hand and attempted to loosen it from his grip, but his fingers wouldn’t budge. If this was really related to Ghost Energy, then she had to do something about it. King Karlheinz said that those who got possessed with ghost energies only had six months at most to live.

“Go away!” Friedhelm shouted.

But before Leti could even ask why, Friedhelm’s left hand moved and held her neck. He was strangling her, and he did not know what to do or why it was happening. He could only plead with his eyes for Leti to run away. But his hand did not loosen its grip on Leti, and it became tighter and tighter the more Friedhelm wished to loosen it. And then, Leti's vision faded out.



“Wait! I am not supposed to come here or else I will die!”

“Hey, noisy today, aren’t we? What’s wrong?”

The only way to come to the Knight King’s Space is to be unconscious in the real world. So if Leti was here, it meant she went unconscious due to Friedhelm strangling her. Therefore, if she didn’t go back to the real world and woke up right now, “death” was the only end waiting for her.

Leti was going to return to the real world when she remembered something and asked Lion King Alexander, “What is Ghost Energy?”

The only knowledge Leti had of it was what she heard from Administrative King Karlheinz – that Ghost Energies were like cursed art pieces created during the time of Knight King Christian, and that its bearer would die within half a year.

“Well, I heard that they were weapons created by the enemies of King Christian to copy the Promise Swords, but they all looked like cursed items to me,” answered King Alexander.

“Yes, I know that much. I also heard that the owner would die within half a year.”

“Nah, it’s more complicated than that. A human wounded by the Ghost Energy would lose their control over their own body ‘cause they’d be manipulated by it. We used to call them ‘slaves.’ Ghost Energies were originally created to kill the stupid Knight King Christian, so naturally, the slaves would move according to that logic.”

Alexander grinned with excitement.

“Do you get the connection now? It means that we, reincarnations of the Knight King, are also targets of the Ghost Energies. There’s no point in hiding your identity, they’ll always know. Those blasted Ghost Energies are too persistent for their own good.”

The Lion King here right now might be fighting against one. He then laughed, saying he was indeed attacked by one a while ago.

“How can I return a slave to normal?”

“Kill ‘em.”

Lion King Alexander, a king who used drastic measures to rebuild his kingdom, gave the coldest and yet the simplest answer to Leti's question. But Leti had her own circumstances and could not easily swallow King Alexander's medicine.

“Is there another way?”

“...Hmmm... if he was just possessed, you might be able to do something. Take a close look at his shadow. There should be a thread-like shadow connecting the slave to the host – the body that has become one with the Ghost Energy. Erase that with light and the slave'd be back to normal. The Ghost Energy can create infinite number of slaves, but it can only control one at a time. Use that knowledge well in fighting against it.”

“Thank you! I shall come back now.”

“As long as the host is still alive, it'll just create new slaves. Make sure to kill the host and then purify the weapon with the Flame Sword. Got that?”

Leti heard Alexander's warning from a distance as her consciousness drifted back to reality.



“Who...is...manipulating...me?” Friedhelm said in a strained voice as he fought the force making him strangle Leti.

“Let this hand, my hand, free Leti! I don’t want to do this to my sister!”

If this situation continued, Friedhelm’s unconscious sister would die by his own hands. Friedhelm prayed for help to come, help in whatever form. And his prayers were answered.

“Prince Friedhelm!?”

Duke’s surprised voice echoed throughout the place. He did not expect to see such a sight when he simply went out to search for his late friend. He immediately knew *something* was wrong when he saw his friend strangling Leti.

“DUKE! Hurry and take my hand off Leti! Quick!”

Duke moved instantly and went to loosen Friedhelm’s grip on Leti’s neck without paying much attention to the contradiction between Friedhelm’s words and his current actions. Duke, with all his might, pulled Friedhelm’s hand away, and that was enough to loosen the grip, even just for a moment. Air passed through Leti’s throat. But Duke’s strength wasn’t enough to pull Friedhelm’s hand away.

“Princess, please hold on a little long...!”

Duke’s speech was cut off by the pain he felt on his hand. Friedhelm’s left hand, holding the paper knife, wounded Duke, and the wound felt like it was digging through his flesh despite the shallow cut. Blood gushed down from the cut, and head-splitting pain attacked Duke.

‘What the heck should I do!?’

In the midst of chaos, it was clear in Duke’s mind who should be prioritized. He knew he should do whatever means possible to ensure the life of the heir, the life of Leti.

“Duke, I’m giving you the permission to draw your sword. Cut off my hand now!”

Friedhelm shouted, pleaded to Duke. His words made Duke feel like he read the turmoil going on inside him. His mind knew what he had to do, but his heart could follow with it. Duke shook his head and refused to follow Friedhelm’s wish.

“Do you think I can do that?!”

“Yes, you can. Now draw out your sword and cut my hand. Don’t let Leti die!”

“But...”

“I’m no delicate flower. I won’t die with one less hand. Please, don’t let me do this!”

As Duke braced himself for what he was about to do, Leti's consciousness came back; the measly amount of air that entered her system when Duke loosened Friedhelm's grip for a moment was enough to bring her back. She understood immediately what was happening based on Friedhelm and Duke's exchange and started to take action to escape her predicament.

'Knight sword, descend upon me and drop your sheath at the back of his neck!'

Leti drew out of thin air the knight sword and dropped it at Friedhelm's nape. Friedhelm lost his grip due to the impact. Duke did not comprehend what had happened, but he knew this was his chance. He successfully separated Friedhelm and Leti.

"Princess! Are you alive!?"

Leti choked at the sudden gush of air passing through her throat. Duke was relieved upon hearing that, since it meant that she was alive. He drew out his sword, ready to make the next move. In front of him was his best friend, clenching the paper knife, preparing as well for his next attack.

"What the heck is this all about?"

"I don't know as well. The only thing I'm certain about is that someone's manipulating my body to move against my will!"

"Is there really nothing you can do?"

“Tried already, but to no avail. Though I’m sure the paper knife’s the cause of this.”

Duke did not know what to do. Behind him was an alive Leti who had nearly died, and in front of him was a puppet-like Friedhelm preparing to attack.

“Please Duke, just cut my hand!”

“Your Highness...”

Duke searched for an answer on what he should do. *‘This is not about what I SHOULD do but what I WANT to do.’*

Friedhelm was Duke’s best friend. He was happy when this friend of his invited him to be his knight – his friend that would’ve been king. He truly appreciated the invitation despite turning it down due to the circumstances of his family. It would be a lie if he said he did not regret turning down an invitation to be one of the Seventh Heaven, a chivalric order composed of only the best of the best.

But Duke still held his sword tighter, more determined.

True, Friedhelm would’ve been a good king, and he was proud of that. In the end, he was not able to get the crown, but he still wanted to be Friedhelm’s knight. But he knew that all of these emotions were mere extensions of his *friendship* with him. He wouldn’t have noticed this fact if he did not learn recently that the desire to protect someone was a whole different feeling.

'Then who is it you want to protect?' Duke asked himself.

"This is a piece of cake for you. Take a look at the difference in the reach of the weapons! Do it in one clean sweep. I don't wanna let Leti see this."

"...Got it. Sorry."

There wasn't time left for him to think. He could only do what he could. Duke prepared himself to deliver one clean hit so that his friend wouldn't have to suffer long. He took one step to the side to block Leti's sight.

"...These two stupid show-off buffoons!"

Leti was still in a bit of a daze, but she clearly understood the situation. She punched the ground, venting off her anger.

'You idiots! It does not matter if Onii-sama loses his hand here or even die because Duke will just be the next slave! I have to eradicate the shadow!'

Leti focused her eyes onto Friedhelm's shadow and saw a thread-like darkness at his feet, unnaturally connected to his own. She knew that if she followed that thread, it would lead her to the host, but that was not her top priority for now.

'Come lightning and descend to the ground!'

Leti called out one of the Promise Swords, the Lightning Sword. To answer her call, the heavily clouded skies parted and blinding, bluish-white lightning flashed. Its light erased the

shadows in the area for a moment. The light was followed by a deafening thunder with shockwaves enough to shake the ground.

Duke and Friedhelm froze. They could not comprehend for a second what happened. Leti, unsurprised at all, checked the thread shadow by Friedhelm’s feet and saw it gone. Then, Leti gave her stern command.

“Duke! Take the knife and throw it far away!”

“Yes, Your Highness!”

Duke obeyed Leti’s order right away. There was something in her voice that made him believe it was the right thing to do. Duke took the knife from Friedhelm’s hand and threw it as far as he could. The metallic sound of the knife hitting a pillar echoed throughout the place, and then silence spread.

“...You are back to normal, are you not?”

“Ye...ah. I’m really back...?”

Friedhelm willed his hands to move, and when it did – when his hands moved according to his own will – the fact that he had control over his body sunk in. He ran towards Leti without thinking and caged her in his arms.

“Thank goodness!”

Friedhelm’s words were nothing but sincere, and Leti couldn’t push him away. Leti looked up at Duke, asking for help with her

eyes but he simply shrugged his shoulders, his face saying, “Just let him be.” Duke had already placed his sword inside its sheath, but he was still holding it, prepared and on standby.

‘Onii-sama used to hug me like this when we were young...I wonder what happened...’

Leti felt her eyelids grow heavier. To add to that, the warmth and nostalgia she felt at being inside her brother’s arms made her sleepier, but she scolded herself, saying that she still had things left to be done. She had to check on the maid’s shadow, ask those two to keep their mouths shut about this incident, and then maybe get some sleep.

The first thing to do was to get rid of that paper knife, but it was now nowhere to be found. Wondering where it went, Leti scanned around the area and found a pair of green eyes floating in the shadow cast by the pillar.

‘He is the assassin from that night! So it is safe to assume that he is the host of the Ghost Energy.’

Both of them knew each other’s identities. The assassin’s sentence that night was, “Don’t tell me you’re the *Knight King*.” Duke’s wild guess of ‘Knight-less Princess’ was partly true.

‘And this revelation connects another point... How did I ever miss it?’

When did all of these incidents with assassins and Ghost Energy start? It was when Leti met *him* – he who was not a normal

knight. It was highly possible that he was in the center of all the incidents happening recently.

The assassin vanished in a puff, so Leti considered this incident as over for now. Besides, she had figured out most of the puzzle.

“Well, then, leave the rest of this incident to me,” Leti told Duke and Friedhelm as she wobbly stood up with her brother’s help.

“Do you *know* what this is about?”

“To a certain extent, yes.”

“Planning on telling us?”

“Nope. You can also let her go. There is no more need to worry about her.”

Leti was moving alone from here on. She would finish that assassin who was acting as the host to the Ghost Energy, and then she’d purify it once the Ghost Energy lost its host.

“Both me and Prince Friedhelm are at fault for this incident for going around unescorted. No harm or damage was done to both parties, so let us just forget about this matter like it never happened. I shall not accept any objections.”

Leti walked towards the maid after saying her piece to check her shadow. The maid's thread might have been erased when lightning came forth.

"I almost killed you, you know!" Friedhelm cried to Leti, who was calmly rearranging the ribbon on her chest.

"As I have said, what do you mean by almost killing me?"

Both knew that Leti's words that casually threw everything out the window was her way of being considerate. Leti straightened her back, squared her shoulders, and walked away as if nothing serious had ever occurred, leaving Friedhelm and Duke standing in silence. Friedhelm broke the silence.

"Duke, sorry 'bout the wound."

"Ah, don't sweat it. It's just a scratch."

The blood on the wound caused by the paper knife was already starting to close, but if he left it exposed, he might stain the other parts of his uniform, so he wiped away the blood and tied a handkerchief around it using his other hand and mouth.

"Duke, be Leti's knight."

"Huh...?"

"She knows *something*."

Duke already had a gut feeling that Leti wasn't telling them everything, and some moments during the incident a while ago

strengthened this belief. Leti's actions after the lightning struck had the impression that she knew it was coming and was waiting for it compared to him and Friedhelm, who were momentarily dazed in surprise. Then after the lightning, Friedhelm was free again.

“Yeah, she probably does,” agreed Duke.

“She has the ability to uncover everything about this. I know she can. But if you did not come, I'd probably have killed my sister with my own hands. She's yet to learn that there are things she cannot handle alone.”

If Duke had not appear at that moment, Leti would not have regained her consciousness, and would have ended up being killed by Friedhelm's hands. Death for any human being is imminent. A simple unexpected turn of events could lead to one's demise. Friedhelm was asking Duke to be the knight that would always be by Leti's side in case anything unforeseen were to happen.

“If you're gonna say that you cannot make a decision because of your friendship to me and your responsibility to Guido... Then let me tell you this. Be Leti's knight. Be the knight that'll protect her.”

But Duke did not nod.

“I refuse. I am a free man moving of my own free will.”

“Then I ask you as her brother. You're the only one who I can trust my sister with!”

“I still refuse. I told you, I only move based on my own volition. No amount of persuasion or urging can make me change my mind. Even if it comes from you.”

“Duke!”

Duke walked away, never looking back at the frustrated Friedhelm calling out to him.

Duke was a tall man with long legs. If he walked faster, his long strides could cover the same distance a kid would by running. He was able to catch up with Leti in no time and called out to her.

“Oi!”

Leti stopped in her tracks and turned around.

“The only person allowed to address me in such a way is my husband, but I shall not be choosing one who would dare call me so. Anyway, what would your business be?”

“I’ve got something to tell you... Can we go someplace else? This isn’t a good place for it.”

Leti thought that she would be asked about the truth behind the paper knife incident, so she warned Duke that she’d only answer questions she felt like answering to. “Yes, of course. But let me tell you this first. I will choose whether I answer your questions or not.”

“I’ll say what I want to say. Let’s go.”

“Wait a minute!”

Duke grabbed Leti's wrist and dragged her without hesitation. Leti had to jog to keep up with his pace.

“Hey! Let go of me. Did I not agree already to come with you?”

Of course, they were not holding hands like couples do. It was obvious that Duke was forcibly dragging Leti somewhere, but one could not be sure how other people would interpret such a situation. Leti was worried about that.

“I also have a situation to deal with here, so just keep up.”

Duke continued walking and pulling Leti's arm, ignoring her complaints. He looked different than usual; he was not his normal, stoic self.

Is he angry about something...? No. It's more like he was driven into a corner... But why?

They reached their destination without Leti ever figuring out what was going on inside Duke’s head. They were in the hearth of the castle, the King’s Gallery, where the portraits of the kings of the past were exhibited. Duke finally let go of Leti's hand and let out a deep, heavy sigh.

“I should be the one sighing here... Well, what is it you wanted to talk about?”

Leti had some inkling on what he would ask. It could be how Friedhelm came back, or how he was controlled. She was already preparing herself and thinking of how much she should tell him when Duke asked something totally unexpected.

“What’s a knight for you?”

Leti was momentarily caught off guard by Duke’s question, but she was able to recover quickly and chose the words for her answer.

“A knight, for me, is nothing but decoration. I do not need, nor do I wish, to be protected. As long as my knight has the abilities necessary to convince the people that he is worthy to be one, then he shall be by my side as an ornament. I do not expect him to give me protection or support.”

Leti was almost invincible with her powers from being the reincarnation of the Knight King. No one would believe her if she told this to anyone, but she really had no need for guards and knights.

“Being alone means I can move the way I wish to. Having someone beside me would slow me down, and it is too much trouble... But... because of you, I’ve changed my mind a little. If you were not there a while ago, I would be dead. Now, I think it is better to at least have one by my side than none at all. ...Thank you for saving Onii-sama from becoming a murderer.”

Duke clenched his teeth upon hearing Leti's words.

‘She really isn’t an adorable young lady at all – like calling Prince Friedhelm ‘Onii-sama’ when he’s nowhere to hear it, or even saying ‘thank you for saving me.’ Who would want to protect a lady like her?’

Leti returned Duke’s question to him.

“Supporting the king, for me, is not part of a knight’s job. If he needs mental or emotional support, let his lovers do that. If he needs political aid, then let his prime minister do that for him. If there is one thing for me to do as his knight, that is to lead the army in case of emergency. But with this peaceful time, I doubt there’d be any need for that.”

The Royal Chivalric Order automatically became Sommevesle’s army in time of war. The knights of the Order would be the ones to lead and take on the officer posts for the army of scouted citizens. But in a peaceful era such as this, surely something else would be expected from a knight.

“What I think a knight should do is stay beside his master at all times, ready to take care of the mundane, troublesome things so that his master can focus on the things that should be done.”

“Mundane and troublesome things?”

“Take what happened earlier, for example. You could have just told me, “I leave the rest to you,” and left.”

Leti noticed immediately that Duke's words were in contrast to what she said a while ago, "Leave the rest about this incident to me."

"...What are you pointing at?"

"It means that I at least know what you're thinking. If you tell me that you will leave it to me, I will clean up the mess left behind the incident. I would know at least what you want me to do. I'll come up with a believable explanation for the maid about what happened and even search for the mastermind for all of this."

"You mean..."

Leti's heart quickened, for she was starting to understand what Duke was implying with his words.

"All you have to do is focus on your tasks as the Queen and as the ruler of the kingdom and leave the rest to me. Do what it is you have to do. So...Let me stay by your side."

Duke silently apologized to Friedhelm.

I've decided to be the knight of this not-so-charming lady. This is of my volition and will, and certainly not because you asked me to.'

"I'm fairly certain that I am the only one who can be your knight. A knight that will accept completely, no explanations needed, that you possess something you cannot speak of – a knight that can catch your drift and move according to your wishes. Am I right? Or am I right?"

Why in the world is this man saying the words she has longed to hear for so long? She wanted to cry out of happiness, but she blinked her tears back and gave Duke her signature confident and haughty smile. She did not want to be perceived as a princess who would cry because of joy. She wanted to be the queen who would simply nod since it was the outcome she was expecting all along.

“...Are you certain of your decision?”

“Yes. But,” Duke lifted up two of his fingers, “I have two conditions.”

“One, I don’t want to be the most tolerable among the rejects. Say that I am better than anyone in Seventh Heaven, Valkyrie or the present Knights of the Round. Say that I’m the best.”

During the first time she invited Duke to be her knight, she had said that he was the best among the “rejects,” and Duke’s pride couldn’t accept that.

“I understand. You are worthy of those words. You are the best among everyone else. Will that do?”

“Yes. Next, once I become your knight, trust me. Tell me everything you can. I, at least, have that right.”

More than Leti’s stubbornness, it was her secretiveness Duke hated the most.

“I see your point. Once you become my knight, I shall tell you everything I can.”

Duke, satisfied with getting Leti's agreements to both of his conditions, took out his sword from its belt and gave it to Leti, complete with its sheath.

“Here, can you hold it? You do know how it’s done, right?”

“We will do it here? A knight’s investiture will not be complete unless there are witnesses.”

“If you’re looking for a witness, you’ve got a lot of them here.”

Duke looked at the portraits hung on the wall. The two of them gazed at the nineteen rulers, kings and queens that reigned over Sommevesle through the years.

“You’ve got Lion King Alexander and Administrative King Karlheinz here. They’re your aspirations, right? I’m sure you’d want them to stand as your witness.”

Duke added jokingly that he did not see the One-armed King, though.



Frustration, happiness, sadness and many other emotions she could no longer name – there was a whirlwind of emotions inside of her upon hearing Duke’s words. She took Duke’s sword to mask the raging storm inside her. She hurriedly carried it with two hands, since she did not expect the sword to be that heavy. The Knight Sword was a part of Leti, so she did not feel any weight in wielding it. So when she took Duke’s sword, she had been expecting the same weight. She was unsure if she could steadily hold it with one hand, but with sheer will power, she was able to draw it out of its sheath.

Duke kneeled before Leti and bowed his head. Leti placed the sword on Duke’s left shoulder, then opened her lips, asking Duke, “With a sword on thy right and a shield on thy left, dost thou swear allegiance to me till the day thou die?”

Of course Leti knew the words for the Knight’s Oath. She was asked to repeat and practice it countless of times as a child. She had thought that when the time came for her to utter those words, it would be purely mechanical, but she was proven wrong. It was a new discovery, and new discoveries were always welcome.

“With a sword on my right and a shield on my left, I swear allegiance to thee till the day I die.”

Leti nodded at the end of Duke’s oath and tapped his shoulders thrice with the sword. Instead of feeling merely happy, she was gratified to have the man she chose become her knight.

“From now on, thou art my knight.”

Leti returned the sword to its sheath halfway and gave it Duke. Duke received the sword, stood up and closed the sword completely; the high-pitched sound of the sword returning to its sheath marked the end of Duke’s Knighting Ceremony.

“...I shall still host a formal debut ceremony for your investiture. It shall be a grand celebration, so you’d better prepare yourself.”

The private ceremony they had would have been enough for both, but since Leti was the next Queen, such a thing was unheard of.

“Grand?”

“Of course. It shall be attended by my family and all the members of the Royal Chivalric Order. It is the Knighting Investiture of the future First Knight of the next Knights of the Round.”

“That is... indeed... grand.”

Duke wanted to invite his parents to attend, but they might swoon with the personalities that shall be in attendance.

“By the way, you do not have to resign from the Order right away. At least until I ascend the throne. We still have few more years before that. Until then, work hard in service for the Order that has taken care of you until now.”

Duke was thankful for Leti's suggestion. There were still some things that should be taken care of, such as the turnover of duties, and quitting suddenly did not feel right for him.

“Oh, I almost forgot, I also have one condition for you.”

“Hey, shouldn't you say those things before you made me your knight?”

Duke was about to protest but Leti hushed him down, saying it was just a simple condition.

“Burn my diary when I die.”

“Diary...?”

“I only write my complaints and rants there. I might wish to die again if I was were known in the future as the ‘Rant Queen.’ Are we clear?”

And naturally, anyone who would hear such words would want to know what was inside.

“When you die, can I read it?”

“Well, you can, though I think I will be writing more about you from now on.”

Leti thought of telling Duke the truth behind what happened today. The truth about her being the reincarnation of the Knight King Christian, and that the perpetrator was a weapon created by his enemies of the Knight King to kill him, and that Friedhelm was

saved by the lightning she called. But thinking about that already made her imagine Duke not believing her story, and she would probably write the whole scenario about it and complain it was Duke who made her tell him, and yet he was the one not believing her story.

Surely days like those would increase, and Leti thought those days might not be so bad at all.

Leti went back immediately to the Royal Villa without dwelling much about Duke’s knighting, saying she still had things to do. Duke, left alone in the Gallery, paid his respects to the kings of the past and made another vow.

“I shall put my life on the line to keep my oath.”

With that vow in his heart, he relaxed at last, and all the tension in his body was lifted, making him feel the sudden exhaustion because of his nervousness.

“You were too nervous, Duke,” Duke said to himself. He had forcibly dragged Leti and made her knight him so that he would not falter in his decision. When he told Leti to make him her knight, he was so nervous, he was really glad he did not choke on his words.

“Seeing you stutter due to nerves would’ve been a breath of fresh air and quite entertaining, but I guess I’m asking for too much.”

“Your Highness!?”

A cheery Friedhelm came out of the shadows.

“I already settled things the way Leticia would want it. After I untied the maid, I woke her up and said that she had passed out for a while and that what happened was just a dream.”

“I see. Thank you.”

“With that, we’re quits. And to think you said those big words to me... But here you are, her knight.”

Duke grumbled something and scratched the back of his head in embarrassment upon knowing that Friedhelm was watching them.

“Her Highness and I are both neutrals; we can understand each other. Besides, the First Seat of the Knights of the Round is such a tempting position. It really isn’t a bad offer if you think about it.”

Duke flatly rejected Leti's forceful invitation right from the start. However, as he got to know her, he learned how the seventeen year old Leti, who could still be called a girl, had a steel-hard resolution to carry the responsibilities of a Queen and a ruler of a country. It did not take long for him to start wanting to

protect her. The main reason why he had not agreed to be her knight was because he had his doubts.

“I was not sure whether I could choose between you and Princess Leticia without any doubt clouding my mind. But...”

When Friedhelm confronted him once that being Leti's knight meant being able to kill Friedhelm if he was ordered to, Duke knew that he could not do it without faltering then. He knew that he was not worthy to be her knight.

“...Sorry, Your Highness. If ordered to, I might have to kill you.”

“I don’t mind at all, you bloke. Protect her with your life. If you fail to do that, come to me and offer your neck as apology.”

“Roger that.”

Duke smiled wryly at the royal siblings voicing out their concern for the other when they are not around, and then Duke came to realize one important thought.

Maybe Her Highness wanted her two older brothers to stand as witnesses as well....’

Duke was convinced that it was something Leti would’ve wanted.

“...At least half of that came true.”

Duke groaned again, thinking that his understanding of Leti was not yet enough, for right now, he was debating whether he should tell her or not about Friedhelm's presence.



“That was quite the show...”

Leti went to the Knight King's Space to report her success in getting the man she wanted to be her knight. Then when One-armed King Oswald asked what made Duke change his mind since he was so repulsive of the notion before, Leti gladly told him the series of happenings that led to this happy conclusion and he could not help but admire what happened.

“Really? In my opinion, I think being helped when I was nearly dying is humiliating. Is being seen as miserable and pitiable really something to be worried about?”

“If that happened to a man, it would have ended in simple sympathy, but for a lady, any man who saw that would want to protect her.”

“I really cannot comprehend that.”

“If you did, you would be a devious lady.”

Leti agreed with it and stood up, saying she'd be going back now.

“Eh, are you going already?”

“Yes. I only wanted to brag about my new knight.”

Leti could only have this kind of conversation here in the Knight King's Space. No one in the real world would be able to notice it, but Leti's head was in cloud nine.

End of Chapter II